

**TESTIMONY OF PATRICK PANNELLA**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION**

**Before the Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism of the**  
**Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation**  
**Re: Oversight Hearing on Professional Boxing**

It is indeed an honor for me to come before you today as a representative of both the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC) and the Maryland State Athletic Commission. My name is Patrick Pannella. I am the Executive Director of the Maryland State Athletic Commission. I have proudly served in this capacity since July of 1995. The Maryland State Athletic Commission is a unit within the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing in the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). Since that time, I have been involved in the regulation of over 700 bouts which have taken place in the State of Maryland. With a few exceptions these bouts have not been of the championship variety, but rather encompass the undercard or “club level” type of bouts which basically comprise the majority of the more than 800 professional boxing shows that were held in the United States last year.

Most of the boxers who compete in the State of Maryland are individuals who are on their way up the boxing ladder, seeking to gain wins and become ranked by one or more of boxing’s numerous sanctioning organizations, or credible opponents who are journeyman boxers earning purse monies amounting to somewhere between one hundred and two hundred dollars a round. Just like the few athletes who compete for large sums of money in televised championship bouts,

these boxers also come under the jurisdiction of federal boxing laws aimed at providing minimal safety measures, protecting the boxer from coercive and unfair business practices, and lending integrity to a sport historically fraught with inequity, corruption and injustice.

Since this Committee held public hearings in regard to the Professional Boxing Safety Act of 1996, I have been fortunate to attend nearly every public boxing hearing held by your distinguished body. When the United States Congress had difficulty in locating an active professional boxer to testify in support of the Professional Boxing Safety Act, I accompanied former Maryland middleweight boxer Alfonso Daniels as he spoke before this Committee. I remember discussions in boxing circles that boxers were apparently worried that testifying in support of a federal boxing bill would somehow hurt their chances to attain a championship fight opportunity or to be marketable. I recall Mr. Daniels telling me that it did not matter to him how boxing perceived his coming forward to testify, as he would do what he thought was right and just.

The brave efforts of Mr. Daniels and the other boxers who have followed him to support the federal boxing laws before this Committee have not been in vain. Positive changes to the sport have been made. A key ingredient of the Professional Boxing Safety Act was requiring all boxers to obtain and to carry a professional boxer's federal identification card. In my opinion, this card has literally saved lives. Shortly before the Professional Boxing Safety Act was signed into law, a boxer from another state appeared in Maryland with false identification. We were fortunate to catch him, and to prevent him from boxing. It turned out that the boxer had a record of some eleven or twelve losses, all via knockout, and no wins. In addition, he had been knocked

out the night before he attempted to compete in Maryland. On more than one occasion, I have joined a ringside physician in spending the night at Maryland's Shock Trauma Center in Baltimore, waiting to find out the status of an injured boxer. It is a scenario that I do not wish to repeat. The professional boxer's federal identification card has dramatically limited the opportunities for boxers to compete using a fake name and to place themselves in physical danger.

The Maryland State Athletic Commission is a member of the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC), and our Commission members and staff have remained actively involved in this organization over these past seven years. The ABC serves as a valuable communications link for its member state and tribal boxing commissions. ABC members disseminate valuable information to each other on a consistent basis; such information would include information pertaining to a boxer's boxing record, boxing history, boxing ability and suspension status. At the recommendation of Tim Lueckenhoff, President of the ABC, the ABC recently created a training seminar to be attended by all referees and judges who work for its member boxing commissions. This was, I believe, a very good idea to conduct such training sessions.

My sincere hope is that the ABC or United States Congress will be able to take a good idea one step further. To ensure that all officials who work championship boxing bouts are competent and fair, I will refer to testimony which Mr. Lueckenhoff provided to this Committee in testimony given last year. Based upon certain prescribed criteria, the respective boxing commissions would submit to the ABC or a federal boxing administration a list of names of those judges and referees deemed to be worthy of officiating at a championship bout from which a "pool" of such

qualified judges and referees may be comprised. As a prerequisite to being placed on such a list, all judges and referees would be required to participate in mandatory training seminars as I described earlier. These officials would be tested by the ABC or a federal boxing administration to ensure that the official possesses the requisite skills necessary to effectively perform. The boxing commission where the championship bout is to take place would then select from this “pool” of officials, without any interference from a sanctioning organization or anyone else, the judges and referees who would officiate the championship bout.

Mr. Lueckenhoff who, unfortunately, is unable to be here today, is already on record with this Committee as supporting the creation of a United States Boxing Administration provided that boxing commissions are able to maintain their autonomy. There is certainly a need to ensure that at least minimum medical and safety standards are in place for all professional boxing bouts, with individual boxing commissions being permitted to maintain higher regulatory requirements as they so choose.

Patently, in the blatant absence of any league, body or organization, there is a need for effective and uniform regulation and enforcement of the sport of professional boxing. Presently, the work of the ABC is carried out by a network of a relatively few number of volunteers. Without any funding, coupled with the lack of enforcement of federal boxing laws by the United States Attorney’s Offices and the chief law enforcement offices of the various states, the ABC is unfortunately unable to have the type of impact on the sport of boxing that it desires. By working together, and benefitting from the resources each provides, the ABC and the United

States Boxing Administration dually can bring uniformity, equity and safety to the sport we all enjoy. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patrick Pannella

Executive Director

Maryland State Athletic Commission